

1: Gusinde

SH6 Yahgan SH6

622, 754, 755, 776, 787, 789, 791, 793, 874

[Information on various aspects of Yahgan culture which are closely related to the characteristics and activities of the yékamuś or medicine-man, including his training, role as a community leader, curer, sorcerer, and custodian of religious lore, have been marked for category 756 and will be found under that classification.]

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human beings and animals, yefšēl, and Hayšēl as though everything were absolute reality. The people around him to whom he gives more or less explicit reports believe them and regard them as true. For example, if he cries, "I have caught this yēšūl, hurled by a hostile yēkamul, with my right hand and and I am placing it on the ground in front of me," this means that the yēkamul performed this act in his vision, whether or not he moved his arms. All the people who hear his words accept them with the same credulity as that shown by a European who listens to his neighbor's report about his dream images. Our Yamana, however, regard everything that happens "in the dream" of their yēkamul as an actual event and believe in its direct effect or in the success proclaimed.

2. Healing the Sick

The field in which the medicine men are most active and in which their help is demanded by their countrymen is that of healing the sick. In order to evaluate this correctly it must be kept in mind that the yēkamul does not combat actual physical suffering. If an ailment has appeared, it is quite possible that a hostile yēkamul, an enemy of the person afflicted, has sent it, and the medicine man recognizes this situation "in the dream" or through a message of his yefšēl. /1418/ If this is truly the case -- the origin of such an ailment might be identified as magical -- then a stronger yēkamul must release the afflicted person from it by neutralizing the sorcery of the hostile yēkamul. For example, if a person has stumbled and fallen or has an upset stomach, he applies a tested remedy which he himself knows or which a member of his family advises. Beyond that, however, in order to be on the safe side, he does not fail to go to a friendly yēkamul to be treated by him in his magical way. /Fig. 98 appears here./ An ordinary human being cannot tell whether his ailment derives solely from natural causes or whether a malevolent medicine man has a hand in it. Most ailments, especially those unfavorably affecting mental activity, are intentionally caused by a vengeful yēkamul in order to make the person ill or even to make him die.

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The medicine man proceeds as follows. By means of his singing he puts himself "in the dream." Now he sees the kēspif of the other person; he seizes a yēkuš and hurls it against the person, who is wounded in a more or less dangerous spot, just as the yēkamuf intended. He immediately recognizes the effect of his yēkuš, although the person who was hit becomes aware of what has happened to him only after some time. The malevolent yēkamuf is pleased over his success, especially if he has performed this act at the special request of a fellow-tribesman. Sooner or



Fig. 98. Yekuš. Two-thirds natural size.

later the other person feels sharp pains; perhaps he will have feelings of fear or, without any reason, will be filled with alarm. Since he cannot find any external reason and cannot explain his condition as due to obvious causes, he will reveal it to a friendly yēkamuf. The latter puts himself in the dream state, discovers and observes how the kēspif of the person was treated, finds the impaled yēkuš, pulls it out, examines it carefully, and recognizes in it the person who hurled it. Simply because he is strong enough, that is, stronger than the first

yēkamuf, he succeeds in freeing the wounded person of the yēkuš and making him well. Otherwise, he is powerless to help and the person must die if the yēkuš has not been removed in time in one way or another (330). Soon after he has awakened, no matter

330. This interpretation was indicated earlier, but in each case inaccurately, by Alvarez:147, Bridges (i):18, Cojazzi:106, Dabbene (b):192, and others. In one instance Bridges says more definitely: "Yecooah, they suppose, is driven into their bodies by some ill-disposed doctor or

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other. This Yecoosh, which can only be seen by a doctor, and can only be held by him, the doctors pretend to suck out of the body of the sick person, who afterwards is supposed to recover his health quickly" /cited in English/ VSA:XI, 258:1964).

how /1419/ his effort has turned out, he notifies the person of his condition and also identifies the yékamuſ who wounded him. Moreover, he soon thereafter turns to that yékamuſ, "in the dream" naturally, reproaches him for his destructive act, and rebukes him thoroughly: "Know that I am stronger than you! Beware of harming any of my relatives or friends! Look at this yékuſ which you hurled against X [he gives the name] and of which I relieved him!" The other yékamuſ realizes that he is exposed and does not contradict him. Sometimes the successful yékamuſ shows the people around him the yékuſ that he took out of the wounded person. Everyone who sees it -- naturally, only in their imaginations, as presented by the yékamuſ -- is amazed at its size and the ability of the medicine man. The people's admiration increases if the yékamuſ has brought relief to a friend who was in great danger from a hostile yékamuſ without being aware of his condition. Many medicine men spend considerable time in the broad realm of imagination and fantasy, and they are obviously the cause of all kinds of provocations by individuals or whole groups against one another.

[578]

Usually the yékamuſ applies his cure directly to the sick person. He has rubbed his own body with white pigment and tied his apawé-a around his forehead. He sometimes also puts two or three of them around his torso. This external trapping lends special solemnity to his activity. The sick person is lying on his pallet, and the yékamuſ squats beside him. Usually members of the sick person's family are present. The medicine man begins his song, and in his awake vision he points with his finger to the part of the body where the yékuſ is lodged. First he presses and massages the spot with his hands; then he puts his mouth to it and sucks as though he were drawing the yékuſ up to the surface. Finally, at the moment of greatest agitation, while his whole body

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is trembling in a frightening manner, he gives a tremendous jerk and lifts up the extracted yékui in his convulsively clenched fists. In another instance he will bend the upper part of his body far forward, press hard against his belly, and make strenuous vomiting motions, meaning that he is trying to get rid of the yékui which he has sucked into his own body from the sick person (331). When

331. Bridges (i):18 describes the activity of the medicine men as follows: "They oftentimes handle the sick very roughly when in this wrought-up state, excited through much chanting and violent contractions they exercised the pain and its cause from the body of the sufferer, pretending to do this by the hands and suction and to swallow the malady and its cause, which was supposed to be an arrow or spear pointed flint called yecoosh, of which the doctors always professed to have a supply in their stomachs" /cited in English/.

the yékui or the stone or harpoon point /1420/ has been extracted in one way or another, the yékamui shows it to the people present, as it lies on the palm of his hand. Then he brings his outstretched hand with the palm upward toward his mouth and with a short, vigorous puff blows the yékui far away so that it is lost. After singing briefly the yékamui gradually awakes and regains full consciousness. Everyone thanks him for his efforts. The person who has been treated also gets up and feels some kind of relief (332). We would interpret this sort of phenomenon as the

332. The writings on the treatment of the sick, for example by Bridges (k):237, Dove (c):158, and others, must be corrected on the basis of the above description.

effect of auto-suggestion.

In the case of superficial injuries or if someone has merely lost his footing, in the case of a slight mental indisposition or after unpleasant dreams, the Yamana goes to the yékamui with

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X⁷⁵⁶
 755 whom he is on familiar terms. He immediately treats the petitioner with what I may call his "magical massage." Thereupon the latter departs in a state of relief. The yékamul gently rubs the painful spot with the palms of both hands, or he massages the joints, or, in the case of an eye disease, he paces his open hands in circular motions in front of the face several times. After that he rubs both hands together, holds the palms upward, and with a vigorous puff that sounds like a shrill fi, he blows the "evil" far away. He makes the same movements over a person who has inadvertently stepped on a "harmful spot" (p. 1200) or over certain foods in order to render them harmless to eat (p. 505).

X⁷⁵⁶
 753 The common people, as well as the medicine men, make
 755 a very definite and clear distinction between an evil and disease caused by a yékamul and one that is caused by Watañéjwa. Every yékamul can make certain of this "in his dream" or by asking his yéñčel, and he notifies the people around him. If a sufferer wretchedly groans f. f. it is obvious that Haučélla has caused the evil and is crying out from the sick person. If, however, an illness is very violent from the start and develops so rapidly that the victim is soon at death's door, the people recognize this as the work of Watañéjwa. In each case, in order to reassure the people and above all, the sick person, the yékamul will try his method of healing. He knows just as well as those around him that the malady has been inflicted on the person by Watañéjwa himself as a punishment and that it is areal illness which only he can take away, that the cause is neither a hurried yékuš nor a Haučéllakipa. Well aware that only Watañéjwa can help, the yékamul tries his best and at the same time begs in the name of the sick person: "May the-one-up-there give you back your health!" If the medicine man realizes his helplessness in the case of /1421/ a certain disease, he, too, turns directly to that higher power which has caused the serious illness. Indeed, even more. Before the yékamul begins his treatment in the case of a particularly serious illness, he prays to Watañéjwa and says: "Heal this man! But if you will not let him get well because you are justifiably angry with him, take the illness away from him for my sake! At least be kind to me, for it is very important to me to make this man well. Be good to me and give me enough strength

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Y¹⁵⁶
755 to make him well! Give the sick man courage and give him back his health, for my sake!" Obviously the yfhamuf is sincere when he addresses these words and other ancient prayer formulas to Wataindjwa so that the sick person will be quickly cured. The yfhamuf, however, is also impelled by ambition; since he wants to prove his ability to the people by any means, he even calls on Wataindjwa for help and relies on his favorable relations with him. If a few members of the same family have died in quick succession, it may happen that a friendly yfhamuf will say to the survivors: "That yfhamuf [he designates him by name] has caused these deaths!" It is a universal belief that only Wataindjwa can cause a person to die. In the case just mentioned the people will complain to Wataindjwa; they will accuse him of being in collusion with that yfhamuf and of acting with him. They will say, for instance: "Hitaqan, why did you join that yfhamuf and, with him, kill our relatives?" This is a cry from a heart tormented by grief and is similar to the well-known cries of mourning (p. 989).

B. General Assistance

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824 The individual Yamana, as well as the independent family groups, will turn to a friendly yfhamuf in all kinds of daily distress. Although I often heard, "Hidibuan causes bad weather, Hidibuan sends the heavy snow and the bad storms!" nevertheless the Yamana also attribute to their yfhamuf a definite influence on the weather (333). Who would not like to have calm, clear,

333. Bridges (I):18 and (K):237 asserted in his day that the medicine men "had power to procure good weather and drive away bad" /cited in English/.

and warm weather down there in the Cape Horn Archipelago? In winter the families like to crowd their dwellings together so that a few yfhamuf are together for a longer period. If on occasion heavy snowstorms continue and the people become sad, the yfhamuf will promise them: "Be quiet and remain brave, tomorrow [or the

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X456
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Dancers success. While they sing, they stare into the distance, stretch out both arms, open their hands and clutch the air, draw their closed hands back to their bodies, open them, press them against the chest and, with gentle pressure, down to their knees. As they do so they repeat a drill several times. With these movements they wish to invoke the kēpif of the game animals, attract them, and gain power over them. The next day the men set out full of confidence.

X456
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The Yamana believe that their medicine men can see into the future and that they have infallible prescience. The yēkamuf themselves are especially convinced of this and give advance warnings to individuals. They also may admonish their whole group to be careful or may announce the prospect of a favorable event. On March 22, 1922, I was standing with several people when Malēmikem said very distinctly: "Outside I see a long /1422/ canoe approaching with uywisiwa [Phalacrocorax olivaceus]!" Sure enough, the following day the people sighted unusually dense flocks of these birds which seldom cross a channel in such numbers. On another occasion Emilia stared out at the ocean like a seeress and cried: "The sea is getting white, mountains of waves are forming and a great deal of foam is gathering!" Her words sounded strange to us, since the surface of the water was entirely smooth. The next morning, however, bad weather came up from the east, causing high waves, and we remembered that Emilia had announced this change at noon of the preceding day. A few people said in wonder: "How remarkable it is that our yēkamuf know so many things in advance!"

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If the population in general is struck by illness, either because they have eaten spoiled meat or, more recently, because of an epidemic brought by Europeans -- something that the yēkamuf occasionally foresees in a dream -- the medicine men feel obliged to help immediately. They are told in a dream at what place all the people must assemble. They announce the place and without delay call the people together to a makāinkina. First, a big fire is kindled. All the adults and children stand around it. As soon as this circle begins to move, everybody raises his fists, wails in hollow sounds, and interjects frequent loud cries of te te. Finally they seize glowing sticks of wood and toss them high in the

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Y¹⁵⁶
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ak. They believe that Watañiñ-wa-sef sent the affliction (p. 970); therefore, the wrath of all of them is directed against him. After that they repeatedly strike at the fire with their hands with fingers outstretched, as though they were pushing the "sickness-evil" into the flames. After this agitated performance the yëkamuf promise the people that they will soon be freed of their suffering.

Y¹⁵⁶
At this point it should be recalled that the medicine man is sometimes a sort of leader. This is apparent in the lôjima-yëkamuf and in the kina (p. 1215). When a murder is to be avenged, he usually leads his people (p. 901), and two hostile groups attack one another under the direction of their yëkamuf. In everyday life, too, everyone likes to get advice from the medicine man with whom he is friendly and acts accordingly; especially if any kind of danger threatens the entire group appeals to him. The following will show that the yëkamuf feel obligated toward their groups. If a depressed mood, a psychic malady, or a general feeling of fear has seized the people, for example, during widespread illness, the yëkamuf arrange the makiñkina, which is also the concluding ceremony of the Kina festival (p. 1289). This remedy dispels the particular spirits that have brought about melancholy and general despondency. If the yëkamuf wish to calm the people after a day of excitement and prepare them for undisturbed slumber, they start the uñer song. This is a real evening song, a soothing farewell to the waning day (pp. 797. 84/).

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Y. Harmful Practices

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If the yëkamuf himself has quarreled with a person and wants to cause him grave harm, or if he intends to avenge a personal insult, or if he is carrying out the secret order of a friend who wishes to do away with an opponent, then he must first of all capture the këspif of the person and lock it up in a little bag, no matter how far away this këspif is. He needs a tiny bit of something that is closely connected or in close contact with that person, either a hair from his cloak of skin, a bit of wood from his hut, or a tendon from his bag; it may even be a

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he wants to help. He realizes that many other Yamana are under the spell of the Haučella, but he does not bother about them."

As an exception, a yekamuŭ will have a female yefčel as his guardian spirit. It is like his daughter, and he may not be guilty of improper behavior toward her. If a yekamuŭ should force his [female] yefčel to make love, his Haučellakipa will grow jealous, come to him in a dream, give herself to him, and make him believe he is embracing the yefčel. The yekamuŭ will be overjoyed, for he does not know that he is being deceived by his Haučellakipa. Slowly he grows weaker, his condition grows constantly worse, and finally, when he is dying, he comes altogether under the power of Haučellakipa. Such a yekamuŭ must, from the start, be on his guard toward his female yefčel. Again it becomes evident that all the Haučella spirits are unfriendly and spiteful, indeed, hostile toward ordinary people as well as toward the yekamuŭ.

Children may result from the union of a Yamana with a Haučella spirit. "They are always full-fledged Haučella; they remain with the Haučella in the earth, and now and then let a person feel their dislike for him. The Haučella spirits are very numerous. A yekamuŭ is well acquainted with each of them."

Although even the yekamuŭ must be on his guard against a Haučellakipa, she is a reliable helper for a particularly difficult act. If he wants to do away with an enemy quickly, he sends his Haučellakipa against him. She enters his body, which swells up enormously, and the end soon comes. For some people it is a pleasure to follow the enticements /1433/ of Haučellakipa into the earth and to remain with her (p.1041). I was given the following explanation of this. "If someone dies at the instigation of a Haučella spirit, his kelpif goes on living among the Haučella, but he himself does not turn into a Haučella and does not harm anyone. The yekamuŭ must see to it that no Yamana lets himself be ensnared by the Haučella or destroyed by them." If a person is under the spell of a Haučella spirit, the yekamuŭ will invite several men and have them form a closed circle around the sick person. He himself holds the evil spirit back for a time within this circle, so that the spirit grows weak. After that the yekamuŭ angrily bites the ground and wounds the Haučella spirit fatally;

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the sick person is then relieved. It may happen that a malevolent medicine man is accompanied by his Hag'ellakipa as he walks through the camp. If the two pass an unsuspecting child, she will take in hikipif away. Quickly an alert yshamul must snatch the kidnapped hikipif from the Hag'ellakipa and give it back to the child. He calls the child to him, rubs his open hands in a gently stroking motion up and down along the child's body several times, makes retching motions and coughs violently. Finally he kneads the child's body and announces: "Now you have your hikipif back!"

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I see a certain consistency in the fact that the Yamana associate the first illness with these spirits. They say: "Before the general upheaval in Yl'asailga, there was not a single sick person, but afterward one man suddenly felt persistent violent pain. He was ill and could not get up. Excitedly many men assembled and considered how this illness could have come about. After searching for a long time they discovered that the disease came from that malevolent woman who at that time escaped and fled to the south where she entered the earth (340). The men

340. In one instance it was said that "a woman tried to see whether she could transform herself and become a Haucella" (p. 1120); another time it was said that "a few women on the Wollaston Islands turned into Haucella and entered the earth" (p. 1260). The difference in the number of persons is unimportant; the significant thing is the agreement concerning the act described.

called this dangerous woman Hag'ellakipa. Then they considered how they could protect themselves against being ill, and they requested the yshamul to offer their help to all Yamana." This account is a good explanation of the first activity of the medicine men.

956 He was trained in his professional duties by an older shaman. There was also held a shamans' institute and feast, which could last several months, to condition and school young candidates. During it, the candidates were secluded, and were required to fast, to sing much, to maintain a certain posture, to go with little sleep, and to drink water only through a hollow bird bone; and were taught healing techniques, tricks of the trade, and so forth. Women were barred from this shamans' school. Shamans were not looked into an organized society.

[69] A full-fledged shaman, besides getting help from his special guardian spirit, was also in close touch with the spirit of a deceased shaman. The shaman's relations were with the world of lower spirits, not with the Supreme Being, Watainawa; and the latter did not figure in the shamans' school.

955 The shaman's chief function was that of curing the sick, but he also influenced weather, helped in hunting, prognosticated, and so forth. The familiar procedures of massage, friction, and anointing, with the extraction of some object supposed to be the immediate cause of the disease, were used in curing. Such objects were often believed to have been sent by malevolent shamans from whose power the good shaman endeavored to deliver the victim. An evil shaman could steal and keep in his possession the soul of a victim, and the victim would die unless his soul were freed by another shaman. It was also the function of the shaman to assign to each infant as soon after birth as possible its own yefitai, a male one to the male infant and a female one to the female. It was the primary and most important duty of the yefitai to protect its charge against sickness and bodily harm and against dangers of all kind.

595 Kina rita.—This Fatigue Institution, with its numerous analogies to the yinchiism of the *Achuar* (p. 78) and with the *Kikistan* of the *Ova* (p. 130), could have been properly discussed under Social Culture because it had primarily a social function. But it is treated here because it also had important religious or pseudo-religious features and was largely under the direction of the shamans. In fact only a shaman could be the leader of the kina rita. Back of the kina rita was a long myth of an earlier time when the women held mastery of the tribe and lorded it over the men. To maintain their supremacy the women used masks to impersonate spirits and to hoodwink the men. Finally, one man discovered the deception, told the other men, and overthrew the women, killing all females except one very young child. In the kina rita only men who had passed twice through the *Girano* rite could take part. Women were kept away from the large conical tent. The men secretly painted themselves and wore conical or ovoidal masks (pl. 33, d) of bark or malakin to impersonate a very great number

77 and might be seized and done to death. However, the shaman usually had power over demons of this type and could give protection.

Apart from and above these lesser spirits was the great Wakasi-
wen, described by Koppers (1925). This supreme being, though
not concerned with creation, was the master of all. He sent the
great flood in days long past, he causes death, he controls the
game and fish supply, he is perfect and almighty. To him prayers
were offered in sickness, grief, and thanksgiving, for this was not
an aloof god normally forgetful of the affairs of mankind. Rather
he was a supreme dispenser of justice, and he always punished
the wicked.

THE SHAMAN

78 Among the Yahgan both medicine-men and medicine-women
existed and played an important part in the community. Super-
natural powers were obtained by certain individuals thought to
have command over a natural spirit and the ghosts of departed
witch-doctors. Thus endowed they could either kill or cure the
individual and could affect the well-being of the community by
controlling the weather or the food supply.

79 Disease, as among many primitive folk, they accredited to
causes no less concrete than wounds. Hence the shaman must
work his cure by removing some foreign object lodged in the body
of the patient through accident or malice. Usually the doctor,
after much massage, manipulation, and incantation, would tri-
umphantly produce a stone or some other object, which he claimed
to have extracted from the sufferer. The cures actually wrought
can be attributed to the often beneficial results of the massage
and to the healing power of suggestion.

75 According to Koppers (1925), the shaman assumed his function
as the result of a "call" coming to either a man or a woman. This
inner vocation took the form of a dream in which friendly relations
were established with natural spirits and with the ghosts of dead
shamans. After several such dreams a personal guardian spirit
would be established. To the men a sort of shaman's school was
open, but women were barred from this because they had not
passed the men's final initiation. During the period of this school
dreams were encouraged by rigorous training, much practice was
given in the necessary sleight-of-hand tricks, and the proper chants
were memorised. The curious spectacle of a man walking on hot